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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sub-Commission on the Promotion
and Protection of Human Rights
Fifty-second session
Item 12 (c) of the provisional agenda

REVIEW OF FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN FIELDS WITH WHICH THE SUB-COMMISSION HAS BEEN OR MAY BE CONCERNED: HUMAN RIGHTS AND DISABILITY

Written statement*/ submitted by Inclusion International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[24 July 2000]

*/ This written statement is issued, unedited, as received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.00-14479

Inclusion International, which represents some 200 associations in 115 countries, acts as watchdog for the protection of the human rights of 60 million persons with intellectual disabilities and the hundreds of millions of family members who share their lives, who can be found in every nation throughout the world.

Inclusion International is one of the largest grass-roots networks of families, friends, self-advocates and professionals, all devoted to combating discrimination, abuse and neglect of these people.

For 40 years this non-governmental organization has developed initiatives in order to reach its goals :
- Inclusion of people with intellectual disability in all aspects of society;
- Full citizenship which respects individual rights and responsibilities;
- Self-determination in order to have control over the decisions affecting one's life;
- Family support through adapted services and self-help networks.

In past years, significant progress has been made in improving the living conditions of people with disabilities:
- Since they were introduced in 1993, the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities have played a major role in making disability issues more visible;

- A number of governments have introduced legislation and policies based on the Standard Rules, and others are on the eve of formalizing policies in order to create sustainable change.

There is growing recognition of their human rights:

- During the most recent meetings of the Commission on Human Rights, the need to respect the human rights of persons with developmental and psychiatric disabilities has been specifically emphasized in Resolutions 1998/31 and 2000/51.

Thus Inclusion International is fully aware of the advances made. Nevertheless, such signs of progress must not only be pursued and developed, but actively defended.

- Almost a decade has passed since the link between disability and human rights was clearly outlined by the Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission, Mr. Leandro Despouy, in his study. But little has come of his work despite the concrete recommendations for action expressed in paragraphs 271-284.

- In practice, people with disabilities continue to be marginalized. People with intellectual disability, in particular, are the most likely of all to be incarcerated in inhumane institutions. They are commonly deprived of an education, refused ordinary social relationships, blocked from meaningful and gainful employment, reduced to irrevocable poverty… their civil and political rights are frequently abused, as are their physical persons.

- These problems are not limited to developing countries. They may be found in every nation of the world, and have been acknowledged by Mrs Mary Robinson, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

- Disability issues are losing visibility. NGOs observe with dismay a growing tendency in international reports to refer to people with disabilities within the poorly defined framework of "vulnerable" and "disadvantaged" groups. Despite the obvious and laudable wish to avoid stigmatization, this broad wording puts the rights and needs of people with disabilities at risk (and in particular those of people with intellectual disabilities) since, unnamed, they tend to be forgotten.

- United Nations human rights organs have failed to agree on an international treaty to promote and protect the rights of people with disabilities, despite the fact that specific and relevant treaties already exist for other vulnerable groups such as women, children, migrant workers and refugees.

Therefore, Inclusion International has decided to take a more pro-active stand in its defence of the human rights of these people.

It is to this end that Inclusion International established in March 1999 its "Task Force on Human Rights" composed of experts from around the world who are competent in a range of specialized issues such employment, bioethics, inclusive education and ageing, and well-acquainted with the working mechanisms of the United Nations and its related agencies.

It is to the same end that Inclusion International signed the resolution adopted by the major national and international disability NGOs attending the Beijing Forum, in full support of the principle of a special Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in order to prevent and remedy violations of their human rights, whatever their disability.

Inclusion International would like to see the human rights of people with intellectual disability maintained on the agenda of the Sub-Commission, as an item of constant concern and attention, and suggests that the Sub Commission request one of its members to review recent developments in this field and submit a paper on this subject.

Inclusion International hopes that the idea of the elaboration of an international Convention that legally binds nations will be supported by the members of the Sub-Commission.

And finally, Inclusion International announces its willingness to co-operate as fully as possible with this Sub Commission, in order to help make respect of the human rights of people with intellectual disability, into a worldwide and everyday reality.